

Paid Leave Protects the Economic Security of Working Families

FACT SHEET

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At some point in their lives, nearly all workers will need time away from their jobs to attend to their own serious illness, care for an ill or injured family member, or welcome a new child. But in the current economic climate—and without public policies providing job-protected paid family and medical leave—most can't afford to take the time they need without causing a family financial crisis. **A paid family and medical leave (“paid leave”) standard would help protect the economic security of countless families who struggle to meet their work and caregiving responsibilities in tough economic times.**

When Working Families' Budgets Are Stretched Thin, Access to Paid Leave Is More Important Than Ever

- **Working families—particularly those who are low-income—need paid leave more than ever, yet very few workers have access to paid leave.** Only 11 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers,¹ and fewer than 40 percent have access to short-term disability insurance.² The disparities between high- and low-wage workers are substantial (for example, only *three percent* of the lowest-wage workers have access to paid family leave through their employers, compared to 18 percent of highest-wage workers).³ Yet low-wage families are the ones most in need of financial support when illness strikes or when a child is born—and the most likely to take on the care of a family member because they cannot afford a professional caregiver.⁴
- **Tens of millions of families are living paycheck to paycheck—increasing the financial impact of personal illness, family caregiving, and the arrival of new children.** The pressures on today's working families make access to paid leave more important than ever. For example, having a baby is the most expensive health event that families face during their childbearing years.⁵ Thirteen percent of families with a new infant become poor within a month.⁶ And nearly half of caregivers say that the current economic climate has made it harder for them to provide care to their family members.⁷ In tough times, paid leave can make a real difference in the health and financial well-being of working families.
- **The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows for important, unpaid job-protected leave—but it doesn't address the financial needs of working families.** Only about half of workers nationwide can access unpaid, job-protected leave the FMLA provides,⁸ leaving about 75 million workers without any family or medical leave protections under federal law.⁹ But even those who do have access to unpaid FMLA leave often can't afford to take it—especially when family finances are stretched thin and every paycheck counts. Too many are forced to sacrifice their health or the health of a family member to protect their economic security.

Working Families Need A Paid Leave Standard

Existing public policies are not meeting the needs of working families—especially in tough times. Currently, there is no national system or standard for paid family and medical leave. Working families desperately need to be able to count on a paid leave standard that will protect their income and their jobs. No one should have to choose between treating a serious health problem or caring for a family member and maintaining their economic security.

California and New Jersey have already implemented effective family leave programs and momentum is building nationwide. The time for action is now. For more information and to get involved, go to www.nationalpartnership.org.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, March). *Employee Benefits in the United States National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2010 (Table 32)*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2010/ebbl0046.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, March). *Employee Benefits in the United States National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2010 (Table 17)*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2010/ebbl0046.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, March). *Employee Benefits in the United States National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2010 (Tables 17 and 32)*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2010/ebbl0046.pdf>

⁴ Williams, J., & Boushey, H. (2010, January). *The Three Faces of Work-Family Conflict: The Poor, the Professionals, and the Missing Middle*. Center for American Progress and Center for WorkLife Law Publication. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/01/pdf/threefaces.pdf>

⁵ Amnesty International. (2010). *Deadly Delivery: The Maternal Health Care Crisis in the USA*. Amnesty International Publication. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.amnestyusa.org/dignity/pdf/DeadlyDelivery.pdf>

⁶ Rynell, A. (2008, October). *Causes of Poverty: Findings from Recent Research*. Heartland Alliance Mid-America Institute on Poverty Publication. Retrieved 14 December 2010, from <http://www.heartlandalliance.org/whatwedo/advocacy/reports/causes-of-poverty.pdf>

⁷ Volunteers of America. (2010, March/April). *America's Caregiving and Aging Challenges: Top Line Data, 6*. Volunteers of America Publication. Retrieved 14 December 2010, from http://voa.org/topline_data

⁸ Waldfogel, J. (2001, September). Family and Medical Leave: Evidence from the 2000 Surveys. *Monthly Labor Review*, 17-23. Retrieved 14 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2001/09/art2full.pdf>

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, December). *Employment status of the civilian population by sex and age (Table A-1)*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t01.htm>

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at www.nationalpartnership.org.